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(Chakka) Maraṇa,sati Sutta 2

Or **Dutiya (Chakka) Maraṇa-s,sati Sutta**

The Second (Sixes) Discourse on the Mindfulness of Death | **A 6.20**

Theme: The mindfulness of death practised night and day facilitates awakening

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2013, 2015

1 Introduction

1.1 The (Chakka) Maraṇa,sati Sutta 2 (A 6.20) is a briefer version of **the (Aṭṭhaka) Maraṇa,sati Sutta 2** (A 8.74), which lists 8 ways in which a meditator (or any of us) could die.¹ Hence, we should not waste any effort or time in practising for the attaining of liberation.

1.2 The (Chakka) Maraṇa,sati Sutta 2 gives the following 6 key ways in which we, meditating alone or in the forest, could die:

- (1) we could be stung by a snake, a scorpion, or a centipede;
- (2) we could stumble and fall;
- (3) our food might not agree with us;
- (4) our bile might act up (liver problem);
- (5) our phlegm might act up (lung problem);
- (6) sharp winds in us might act up (muscular or nervous problem);

1.2 The (Aṭṭhaka) Maraṇa,sati Sutta 2 gives the same 6 key conditions for death, and adds the following as the last two conditions, that is

- (7) we could be attacked by other people; or
- (8) we could be attacked by non-humans (eg wild animals, or unknown causes).

1.3 Hence, we should not waste any effort or time—night [§§4-12] or day [§§13-20]—in practising the mindfulness of death for the attaining of liberation.

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(Chakka) Maraṇa,sati Sutta 2

The Second (Sixes) Discourse on The Mindfulness of Death

A 6.20

The Buddha exhorts the monks

1 At one time, the Blessed One was staying in the brick house² at Nādika [Ñātika].³

¹ For **(Aṭṭhaka) Maraṇa,sati S 2** (A 8.74), see SD 48.6. For **(Chakka) Maraṇa,sati S 1** (A 6.19), see SD 48.11.

² **The brick house** (*giñjak'āvasatha*) is mentioned in **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,2.5/2:91 + 2.10/2:96), SD 9; **Jana,-vasabha S** (D 18,1/2:200), SD 62.3; **Cūḷa Go,siṅga S** (M 31,1/1:205), SD 41.11; V 1:232. It is specially mentioned because generally other buildings are made of wood (MA 2:235).

2 There, the Blessed One addressed the monks, “Bhikshus!”

“Bhante!” the monks replied to the Blessed One in assent.

3 “Bhikshus, **the mindfulness of death**, when cultivated, grown, is of great fruit, great benefit, plunging into nirvana, ending in nirvana.⁴

Night reflection

4 How, bhikshus, is *the mindfulness of death*, when cultivated, grown, of great fruit, great benefit, plunging into nirvana, ending in nirvana?

5 Here, bhikshus, when day has ended and night has fallen,⁵ a monk reflects thus:⁶

‘Many are the causes of [conditions for] my death!

bahukā kho me paccaṃyā maraṇassa

(1) A snake might sting me, or

ahi vā maṃ ḍaṃseyya

a scorpion might sting me, or

vicchiko vā maṃ ḍaṃseyya

a centipede might sting me.

sata,paḍī vā maṃ ḍaṃseyya

REFRAIN:

This would be the death of me,

tena me assa kāla,kiriya

this would be an obstacle for me!

so mama’ssa antarāyo

6⁷ (2) I might stumble and fall, or

upakkhalitvā vā papateyyaṃ,

(3) my food might not agree with me, or

bhattaṃ vā me bhuttaṃ vyāpajjeyya

(4) my bile might act up, or

pittaṃ vā me kuppeyya

(5) my phlegm might act up, or

semhaṃ vā me kuppeyya

(6) sharp winds in me might act up.

satthakā vā me vātā kuppeyyuṃ

REFRAIN:

This would be the death of me,⁸ or

tena me assa kāla,kiriya

would be an obstacle to me!’

so mama assa antarāyo’ti.

Self-review: Death in the night

7 Bhikshus, it should be reflected by this monk, thus:

‘Are there in me bad unwholesome states that are unabandoned, that would be an obstacle should I die in the night?’⁹

³ **Nādikā** or **Ñātikā** (according to Buddhaghosa, two villages of the same name on the same river bank) was on the highroad between Kuṭṭigāma and Vaiśālī (V 1:230 ff; D 2:90 f, 200; M 1:205). The Buddha’s instructions to Ānanda given here are also recorded in the Saṃyutta, which has **Ñātika** as the place-name (S 5:356 ff.). Comys to both the Dīgha and the Saṃyutta confirm it as “Ñātika,” explaining that “There were two villages close by the same pond, inhabited by the sons of two brothers. Thus, both of them were called Ñātika (‘of the relatives’)” (DA 2:543; SA 2:74).

⁴ *Maraṇa-s,sati bhikkhave bhāvitā bahulī,katā maha-p,phalā hoti mahānisaṃsā amat’ogadhā amata,-pariyosānā*. Significantly, the mindfulness of death, properly done, can lead to the attaining of nirvana: see [§3].

⁵ *Patihitāya* or *paṭihitāya* is past part of *patidahati* (Skt *pratidadhāti*: SED sv *prati-dhā*, “to commence, begin, approach”). Comy glosses it as “has reached” (*paṭipannāya*, AA 3:352). This is a rare form, found only in A 6.20 and A 8.74. It is found neither in PED nor in CPD.

⁶ *Idha bhikkhave bhikkhu divase nikkhante rattiyaṃ patihitāya* [Be *patihitāya*; Be:Ka *patigatāya*; Ce *pahitāya*; Ee Se *paṭihitāya*] *iti paṭisañcikkhati*. On *patihitāya* or *paṭihitāya*, see prec n.

⁷ In practical reflection, we can, if we wish, add the refrain after each of the other 5 lines. Quoted at Vism 8.26.2 @ SD 48.14.

⁸ “The death of me,” usu idiomatic, alluding to something disastrous, eg, “This task will be the death of me!” Here, however, it is to be taken literally.

8 If, bhikshus, a monk reflecting in this way, knows thus:

‘There *are* in me bad unwholesome states that have not been abandoned, that would be an obstacle should I die in the night.’

9 Then, bhikshus, that monk should work on the abandoning of just those bad unwholesome states, with extraordinary enthusiasm and effort and industry and great perseverance and relentlessness and mindfulness and clear comprehension.¹⁰

10 PARABLE OF THE BURNING HEAD. Bhikshus, just as one whose turban is ablaze, or whose head is ablaze, would act with extraordinary enthusiasm and effort and industry and great perseverance and relentlessness and mindfulness and clear comprehension to put out the fire on that turban or that head,¹¹ even so, bhikshus, *that monk should work on the abandoning of just those bad [321] unwholesome states, with extraordinary enthusiasm and effort and industry and great perseverance and relentlessness and mindfulness and clear comprehension.*

Self-review: Inner purification

11 If, bhikshus, a monk reflecting in this way, knows thus:

‘There are *no* bad unwholesome states in me that are unabandoned, that would be an obstacle should I die in the night.’

12 Then, bhikshus, he should dwell in that very zest and gladness, training night and day in wholesome states.¹²

Day reflection

13 Here, bhikshus, when night has ended and day has dawned, a monk reflects thus:

‘Many are the causes of my death [the conditions for my death]!’

(1) *A snake might sting me, or a scorpion might sting me, or a centipede might sting me. That would be the death of me, this would an obstacle for me!*

14 (2) *I might stumble and fall, or*

(3) *my food might not agree with me, or*

(4) *my bile might act up, or*

(5) *my phlegm might act up, or*

(6) *sharp winds in me might act up.*

This would be the death of me, or this would be an obstacle to me!’

Self-review: Death in the day

15 Bhikshus, it should be reflected by this monk, thus:

‘Are there in me bad unwholesome states that are unabandoned, that would be an obstacle should I die in the day?’¹³

16 If, bhikshus, a monk reflecting in this way, knows thus:

⁹ *Atthi nu kho me pāpakā akusalā dhammā appahīnā, ye me assu rattiṃ kālaṃ karontassa antarāyāyāti.*

¹⁰ *Tena bhikkhave bhikkhunā tesarṃ yeva pāpakānaṃ akusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ pahānāya adhimatto chando ca vāyāmo ca ussāho ca ussoḥhī ca appaṭivānī ca sati ca sampajaññaṃ ca karaṇīyaṃ.*

¹¹ This parable recurs at **Cela S** (S 56.34), regarding the urgency of realizing the 4 noble truths (S 56.34/5:441).

¹² *Tena bhikkhave bhikkhunā ten’eva pīti, pāmojjena vihātabbarṃ aho, rattānusikkhinā kusalesu dhammesu.*

¹³ *Atthi nu kho me pāpakā akusalā dhammā appahīnā, ye me assu rattiṃ kālaṃ karontassa antarāyāyāti.*

‘There *are* in me bad unwholesome states that have not been abandoned, that would be an obstacle should I die in the day.’

17 Then, bhikshus, that monk should work on the abandoning of just those bad unwholesome states, with extraordinary enthusiasm and effort and industry and great perseverance and relentlessness and mindfulness and clear comprehension.

18 PARABLE OF THE BURNING HEAD. *Bhikshus, just as one whose turban is ablaze, or whose head is ablaze, would act with extraordinary enthusiasm and effort and industry and great perseverance and relentlessness and mindfulness and clear comprehension to put out the fire on that turban or that head, even so, bhikshus, that monk should work on the abandoning of just those bad unwholesome states, with extraordinary enthusiasm and effort and industry and great perseverance and relentlessness and mindfulness and clear comprehension.*

Self-review: Inner purification

19 If, bhikshus, a monk reflecting in this way, knows thus:

‘There are *no* bad unwholesome states in me [322] that are unabandoned, that would be an obstacle should I die in the day.’

20 Then, bhikshus, he should dwell in that very zest and gladness, training night and day in wholesome states.

21 Thus, bhikshus, the mindfulness of death, when cultivated, grown, is of great fruit, great benefit, plunging into nirvana, ending in nirvana.

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